

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-06 EUR-12 EA-07 NEA-10 ISO-00
ERDA-05 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EPG-02
DODE-00 FEAE-00 FPC-01 H-01 INR-07 INT-05 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-04 USIA-06 OES-07 SP-02
SS-15 STR-04 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 /134 W
-----161307Z 016285 /43

R 160815Z MAY 77

FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5430

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

RUDTCQJOAMEMBASSY LONDON 1110

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY QUITO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USINT BAGHDAD

USLO RIYADH

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAHRAN 0563

E.O. 11652: GDS

TEGS: ENRG, SA

SUBJECT: ARAMCO OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ABQAIQ FIRE

REF: DHAHRAN 0549

1. AS INDICATED IN PARA 7 OF REFTTEL, CONGENOFF WAS GIVEN DETAILED REVIEW OF ABQAIQ FIRE ON MAY 15. EXECUTIVE GIVING BRIEFING WAS AMRAMCO VICE PRESENTENT WHO WAS SENT TO ABQAIQ TO TAKE CHARGE OF FIRE CONTROL ACTIVITIES THE FIRST NIGHT (MAY 11/12) OF FIRE. VP NOTED AT START OF DISCUSSION THAT FIRE HAD BEEN EXTINGUISHED LATE AFTERNOON OF MAY 14 BUT NOT BEFORE ANOTHER GAS-OIL SEPARATOR SPHEROID WAS SEVERELY DAMAMGED. IN THAT FINAL INCIDENT OF FIRE, ONE FILIPINO EMPLOYEE WAS KILLED AND ANOTHER WAS INJURED.

2. PENDING FIANL RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION AS TO CAUSE OF ABQAIQ FIRE, ARAMCO OFFICIALS ARE ALMOST CERTAIN THAT FIRE WAS CAUSED BY RUPTURE OF CRUDE PIPELING BUIRED SIX FEET BELOW SURFACE. DEPTH OF PIPELINE, IN THEIR VIEW, COMPLETELY RULES OUT THE THOUGHT OF SABOTAGE. ASSUMPTION IS THAT LINE, WHICH IS ONE OF OLDEST IN FACILITY AND CARRIES CRUDE UNDER 600 LBS OF PRESSURE, RUPONRED BECAUSE OF CORROSIVE ACTION WHICH THINNED THE WALL OF THE PIPE. RUPTURE OCCURRED AT ONE OF WORST POSSIBLE PLACES IN FACILITY -- IMMEDIATELY BELOW PIPELINES RUNNING CRASSWAYS ON THE SURFACE WHICH CARRY CRUDE AND STEAM AT 700 DEGREES F. SURFACE PIPELINES LEAD OUT FROM NR. 5 PUMPING STATION THAT WAS SEVERELY DAMAGED BY FIRE.

3. WHEN RUPTURE OF UNDERGROUND PIPELINE OCCURRED, NR. 4 PUMP STATION, JUST UPSTEAM FROM POINT OF RUPTURE, SHUT DOWN IMMEDIATELY. PUMP STATION NR. 5, HOWEVER, WAS UNABLE TO CHOKE OFF ITS INFLOW OF CRUDE (AND STEAM) QUICKLY ENOUGH
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AND GEGAN SPEWING OUT CRUDE ON TO GROUND. SPARK SET OFF CRUDE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. FIRE SPREAD QUICKLY AND WAS FED AS MORE CRUDE FLOWED ONTO GROUND. ABQAIQ FACILITY IS LAID OUT WITH CANNAL TO CHANNEL CRUDE OUT OF THE AREA IN EVEN OF BREAK IN PIPELINES,BUT VOLUME OF CRUDE POURING ONTO THE FIELDNLAS SO GREAT THAT IT SPREAD TO NEIGHBORING AREA WHERE EIGHT GAS-OIL SEPARATOR SPHEROIDS ARE LOCATED BEHIND PROTECTIVE DIKES. UNFORTUNATELY THE FIRE ENGULFED THE PUMPS THAT CONNECT THE SPHEROIDS TO THE PTHELINES AND THEY BEGAN LEAKING OIL ONTO GHE GROUND, WHICH FURTHER FUELED THE FIRE. IN INTENSE HEAT, TWO SPHEROIDS WERE DESTROYED AND TWO OTHERS WERE DAMAGED TO SOME DEGREE BUT, IT IS BELIEVED, NOT SEVERELY. FORTUNATELY NEARBY TANK FARM, WHICH IS USED ONLY TO HOLD CRUDE WHEN THERE IS BACK UP OF CRUDE BEING SHIPPED TO OCEAN LOADING TERMINAL 70 MILES TO NORTH, WAS EMPTY AND FIRE, WHICH MODERATELY DAMAGED ON TANK, DID NOT SPREAD IN THAT DIRECTION.

4. AS MATERS STAND, ABQAIQ FACILITY HAS LOST TWO-THIRDS OF ONE OF ITS THREE PUMPING STATIONS. NONE OF THE PUMP STATIONS AT ABQAIQ ARE

MOVINGICRUDE (ALTHOUGH THE OIL COMPANY IS PUMPING 700,000 BM7F CRUDE AROUND ABQAIQ). ON MORNING OF MAY 15, WORK CREWS ENTERED THE BURNED OUT AREA ON A BLINDING EXERCISE (I.E. FULLY SEALING OFF ALL DAMAGED PIPELINES PRIOR TO GOING IN TO MAKE FINAL REPAIRS). ONCE THAT TASK HAS BEEN COMPLETED, WHICH COULD BE AS SOON AS NEXT COUPLE DAYS OR "BY THE END OF THE WEEK," (-6 19) ARAMCO WILL BEGIN PASSING CRUDE THROUGH ABQAIQ AGAIN.

5. COMMENT: AS FOREGOING SUGGESTS, FIRE AT ABQAIQ FACILITY WILL CURTAIL PRODUCTION FOR NEXT FEW DAYS UNTIL IT CAN BE SEALED OFF AND INSPECTION COMPLETED. ASSUMING MOVEMENT OVER PIPELINE CAN BEGIN BY END OF WEEK, WE ESTIMATE THAT THREE-QUARTERS OF PRODUCTION CAN FLOW THROUGH THE PIPELING SYSTEM IN ABQAIQ WHEN RESTORED TO SERVICE. IN ADDITION, 700,000 BPD WILL CONTINUE TO MOVE NORTH THROUGH THE ABQAIQ BYPASS PIPELINE (SEE PARA 4). AS ABQAIQ WAS PUMPING 5.5 TO 6 MILLION BPD BEFORE THE FIRE, THIS SUGGESTS THAT THERE WILL BE DAILY LOSS OF PRODUCTION IN RANGE OF 650,000 - 800,000 BPD. FOREGOING
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ESTIMATE WAS RUN BY ARAMCO OFFICER CITED ABOVE AND HE COMMENTED THAT IT IS A ROUGH BUT WORKABLE ESTIMATE FOR NOW. A MORE ACCURATE ESTIMATE CAN BE PREPARED IN FEW DAYS TIME. WHEN FULL ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE TO FACILITY IS COMPLETED.

BUSHNELL

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